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WHAT HIGH SCHOOL LATIN FURNISHES TO COLLEGE PREPARATION IN ENGLISH

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I can perhaps put myself more easily into the attitude of a High School student of Latin and of English than can some of my contemporaries because of a rather recent experience in getting acquainted, through four years, with another ancient language, Greek. There is very present with me the delight and illumination of that experience; and something of the same sort should be, I suppose, making due allowance for the difference for experience and perspective, the harvest of the preparatory school student from his four years study of Latin. One element in that result surely should be the light it throws on his English work.

In the first place, a great service to English preparation for college which Latin can perform is an architectural sense: a perception of the structural beauty of a great language, a vivid, constantly growing appreciation of the exquisiteness of adaptation marking a well-wrought Latin sentence, which shall make him growingly impatient of hurried or shabby workmanship. Indeed, by virtue of its very foreignness, the perfect passage from Cicero or from Vergil may, in a very peculiar sense, become the touchstone, for the student, of taste in writing. Such a passage stands bright and clear, far above the shifting tides of fashion or whim, to be judged, necessarily, by its own standards; stands unblurred in its clarity of word association, in its stateliness of word sequence, by the shiftlessness and slovenliness of current colloquial speech. Intimate the student may grow, in a sense, with the graceful intricacies of this perfect passage; yet out of that intimacy can never rise, because of its very "differentness," any obscuring of it by the filming familiarity of everyday intercourse. I have gone around two weeks now with a sentence of Sallust's running through my brain. "*Erat, inter ingentis solitudines, oppidum magnum atque valens, nomine Capsa, cuius conditor Hercules Libys memorabatur.*" And the city that blossoms for me in the desert out of the mists of ancient legend has lost, by

repetition of the sentence giving birth to it, none of its remote magical qualities; nor, because probably of my Anglo-Saxon inheritance of a different association of thought and therefore of word order, has the exquisite unfolding of the sentence, phrase by phrase, word by word, lost any jot of its vividness. To furnish, then, the students mind with unblurred illustration of noble adaptation of part to part, in a medium adequate and unhackneyed, is one great service that High School Latin can perform for English preparation. And such service, appreciation of Latin construction, is unquestionably performed for the promising student by such knowledge of syntax as enables him to translate English into good Latin. Such translation is ideally accomplished when done with actually constructive imagination. To look back a moment at the Sallust sentence above quoted. The student can easily be made to see how the magic of it springs from the fashion in which it unfolds before our eyes: how under its spell we first feel waste lands stretching around us, then a settlement rising into gallant proportions in its midst, and finally, under the spell of the name of Hercules, receding into legend-haunted perspective. And realizing that, he can soon be brought to realize how in his own work he can, to some degree at least, in his translating of English into Latin, experience the artist's constructive pleasure. Immense care should be taken, it seems to me, that the English passages chosen for Latin prose should be interesting and beautiful. If this is done, the beauty of the English will serve as stimulus toward transformation of it into a new form of beauty, the Latin words and constructions at his disposal will be his materials for the process, and Latin prose will become a genuine aesthetic experience to be repeated in his English composition, if only we can succeed in breaking down the walls which the student seems naturally to build between departments, so that experience in the Latin class room may flow freely into the English.

Closely associated with this stimulation toward good writing, is the service performed by the Latin teachers in the High School in fulfillment of the requirement that the student be able to translate Latin into idiomatic English. Of course the stress lies

on the word "idiomatic"; and here, entirely, the work of the Latin teacher and the English teacher coincide. A literal translation, given an adequate knowledge of forms, is simple enough. But the elusive differences of linguistic temperament which sometimes make a literal translation an essentially false translation are often difficult for the young student to grasp. The subtle logical considerations underlying the English use of prepositions, for instance, in cases where the most sensitive of us rather feels, than sees, the reason for using one instead of another, frequently reveal themselves even to the specially trained mind only after earnest pondering; and you are sometimes forced to the conclusion that mere chance has decided upon one of two equally logical expressions as the correct idiom. I know no situation when one is more overwhelmed, as a teacher, with sense of complete powerlessness than when faced by a polite but firm young student who insistently maintains that if you say, "This woman cherishes **a** warm regard for her husband's opinions," you are therefore justified in saying, "This woman acts in utter disregard for her husband's opinions"; that if you say "They found the boy engaged in an earnest search for birds' eggs," you must also be permitted to say "He started out in search for birds' eggs." The reason is there, and you will probably think it out in a moment. But meanwhile the student gazes at you with fixed, round eyes, and you know that, whether you think it out then or not, your job is to steer him, for the salvation of his literary soul, between the Scylla of arbitrary purism on the one hand, and the Charybdis of juggernaut individualism on the other. This use of prepositions, then, is one of the stumbling blocks in the path of the young student of English; and no greater illumination on the subject could possibly be furnished him than that gained by his practical knowledge of the careful use of them in his Latin prose, and by the necessity of being equally careful, in his translation of Latin into English, that his prepositions are used with equal punctiliousness. It is quite evident, then, that immense service can be rendered to the English teacher by punctilious care on the part of the Latin teacher that any translation, however free, shall be idiomatic.

I read with interest in the Vassar catalogue the statement that the candidate for entrance here must read Latin prose and verse according to the Roman method of pronunciation, with strict attention to vowel quantities. I feel the strongest possible conviction that a requirement analogous to that should be added to the English requirement for entrance. The lamentable impossibility of getting intelligent, clear-cut reading of simple English poetry and prose, in illustration of the points made in class discussion, is one of the most hampering elements in English work; and here again, it seems to me, we have an illustration of the failure of the student to carry over experience from one department into another. That he actually reads Latin verse paying careful and intensive attention to pronunciation and vowel quantity in one class, and, in the next, tramples over the words in lovely English verse, crushing some out of existence, maiming and mutilating others, is just another proof of the failure of the gallant but hopeless fight waged in the class room against the destructive vandalism that massacres innocent parts of speech during the major portion of the day. "We must not forget," said a Wellesley English instructor recently, "that the English of our class rooms is a foreign language, entirely distinct from the English that the average student speaks elsewhere." The Latin teacher in preparatory schools furnishes effective aid to English college preparation when she emphasizes the fact that recognition, by means of correct reading aloud, of the dignity and beauty of the Latin hexametre, ought to prove for the student one entrance into the pleasant land of Faerie where the rhythms of the poets flow on like rivers through landscapes their artistic vision has created for us. I sometimes wonder if a little comparative work could not be done here,—if Latin and English classes could not meet together to read Milton and Spenser and Vergil in order to compare them; if such co-operation would not serve to throw into interesting contrast the characteristic qualities of their verse. This sort of comparative work, bringing English verse into direct connection with their strenuous training in Latin scansion, would be one means, surely, of domesticating for him, as it were, the idea of careful handling of English poetry, so that careless or slovenly reading of it would seem mutilation.

Another service which preparatory school Latin renders to English college preparation is, of course, comprehension of the actual meaning of English words. As a matter of fact, however, it is singular how little established among the students when they come to college is the habit of turning back to Latin for the grasping of word-significance. One easily pardons, of course, the student who remarked that *an anarchy* was a government in which the power was centralized in the hands of one man, since she probably has not studied Greek; but when it comes to variously defining *comitatus* as "a man bound to the service of a chief, or even as "the oath that binds him" one must protest that something is wrong. That chronic error of the mathematic class room, also, the constant mixing up of the verbs *intersect* and *intercept*; is a fair example of the dullness of young students in regard to the etymology of words. Of course the point is that though, in a general way, the average student actually does know that many English words are derived from Latin, and although the fact has been, no doubt, amply illustrated for him, he has not really assimilated that knowledge in any such way as to make his Latin an immediate effective illuminator of his English. Latin remains, after all, to many a student, an aloof, ancient tongue from which during the centuries English has borrowed many of its longer words. I have often wondered if in some way this linguistic chasm could not, in the mind of the student, be more effectively bridged; if Latin could be made to seem to him, linguistically, not a mere esoteric storehouse from which English pulls out, from time to time, words of from three to five syllables, or, to change the figure, if he could be made to feel towards it not as towards a rich and remote benefactor of English (somewhat resented sometimes, as rich benefactors, through an unpleasant trait in human nature, usually are), but as towards its a genuine linguistic brother. He needs to be made to realize that, not only when he is using such words as *compromise*, *priority*, *regulation*, etc., is he touching Latin, but that when he is using many short homely native English words such as "tooth," "book," "black," "feather," "flow," he is touching it in quite as real a sense, since in each case he is using a word that has not been contributed to English, late in

time, from Latin, but one that has a veritable Latin twin in the sense that both have descended, through the ages, along different paths, from the same Indo-European root. In short, if he could have stated and illustrated for him early in his Latin work, in connection with a chart showing the various branches of the Indo-European family, the fact that one reason why English looks so different from Latin is that the Teutonic languages took early a big consonant shift so that many a homely English word in daily use is only a disguised, linguistic brother of a homely Latin word, I think it would have a tremendous effect in making Latin seem close to him. This fact of linguistic cognation, as distinguished from derivation, immensely interests very young people. They are only mildly interested in the fact that *dentist* is a derivative of Latin *den-t-*; but that the cognate *tooth* is actually the twin of Latin *den-t-* surprises and pleases them. They exhibit a languid, somewhat bored, interest in the derivation of our word *pen* from the Latin *penna*; but their interest becomes marked at discovering that our word *feather* is the same word with a mask on. And whereas the word *carpere* is received politely by them as a part of their ordinary Latin vocabulary, it instantly springs into poetic light and color when they realize that our word *harvest* is practically exactly the same word disguised, and means *the thing plucked*. Years of experience with young students have convinced me that realization of this fact of the cognation of homely English and Latin words, reinforcing the fact of the derivation of many English words from Latin, immensely strengthens the sense of the nearness of Latin to English, marshals the Latin vocabulary, in fact, into an army of effective auxiliaries marching each shoulder to shoulder with its English mate. It seems to me that there might be effective co-operation between the Latin and English departments in developing in the student a sense of language relationships, so that a table of the branches of the Indo-European family might gain life and vividness by means of concrete instances, and that thus a foundation might be laid for, and an interest aroused in, the history of language.

As a teacher of literature I turn with especial interest to the prescribed reading outlined in the Latin requirements for admission to Vassar; and the points I have heretofore touched, the nice

appreciation of Latin construction, and the nice appreciation of Latin derivatives springing from study of their composition and meaning, are called into instant requisition as elements in equipment for adequate literary criticism. This is primarily true of course of writers such as Milton whose style so markedly shows Latin influence and yet so triumphantly vindicates the essential originality of his genius; just as, in connection with Greek, Matthew Arnold, profoundly moved by the great Greek writers, reflecting them again and again in dramatic or epic structure, yet subtly modifies such structure to application to wild northern mythology or modern philosophical theory. Especially necessary, also, for critical appreciation of Milton is familiarity with the history of Latin derivatives since they have, often, in his hands advanced only a part of the way towards their modern meaning, or have been deliberately, for purposes of vividness, pushed back toward their first significations. *Earth a punctual spot; heavens' ruining*; *Delilah a specious snare*, discovering Samson's *capital secret*, such word-groups can only be adequately understood by one used to the historical treatment of meanings. The point I made a moment ago, the resting of much of Milton's structure squarely on classical foundations, touches one of the chief services that Latin can render to English,—the laying foundations for the comparative study of literature. Actual material for such comparative study lies at hand in the preparatory school course: comparison, for instance, of the brilliant stories of Ovid and of Chaucer; of the orations of Cicero and of Burke, etc. And there are significant stores of material from Latin sources that, by proper emphasis, may be stored up in the minds for comparative use in the future as he becomes more widely acquainted with English. Not only on the score of his brilliancy does Ovid challenge comparison with Chaucer. His telling of the Medea story invites comparison not only with Chaucer's telling of it, but also with Caxton's, Hayward's, and Morris's; Nepos's biographies, with Asser's of Alfred; Vergil's eclogues with Barclay's, Spenser's and Pope's; and Vergil's *Aeneid* with English epic from *Beowulf* to Morris's *Sigurd*, Arnold's *Balder*, and Noyes's *Drake*. The rich and beautiful background for the study of English literature that can be furnished to the pupil by the intensive study of the

great Latin writers cannot be over-estimated in value, if this point of view is constantly and consistently impressed upon him.

Latin, then, is furnishing to English preparation for college, first, a nice appreciation of beautiful sentence structure based upon practice in turning idiomatic English into idiomatic Latin; second, practice in subtle English idiom by translating Latin into idiomatic English; third, a habit of close attention to text necessitated by proper pronunciation of Latin, scansion of Latin verse, etc., with ultimate contribution to the student's power to read aloud well English verse; fourth, illumination as to the meaning of English words; fifth, the possibility of actual practice in the methods of comparative literature, and a storehouse of material for later comparative work in college. And one method of allowing free play of this influence of Latin preparation on English preparation would be, surely, the freest kind of intercourse between the two departments: meetings of classes to read and talk over Latin and English poetry, for instance; or to note the Ovidian touches appearing in Arnold's *Balder Dead*; the reporting from one class to another of interesting etymological lore. A multitude of connections between the classes could be made if there were only more time.

But, after all, I find that the thing that has been most persistently with me in thinking over this matter is one I have not mentioned yet and one which seems to me, perhaps, in these days, the most important of all, namely, the creating vividly, and as a permanent possession in the mind of the student, a sense of the beauty of antiquity. "The glory we call Rome," shining characteristically through its stately linguistic medium, should illumine, for the young student, a spacious field of noble and constructive ancient thought, which, as background, along various lines, for his work in English, should serve to develop that sense of historical perspective without which all knowledge of modern periods and literatures must lack depth and balance. The development of a sense of proportion, through dawning appreciation of the evolutionary relation existing between ancient and modern civilizations, seems to me, on the whole, the most valuable service that High School Latin can offer to College preparation in English.